Biden peddles national self-delusion on pandemic anniversary

Patrick Martin
11 March 2021

The nationally-televised address by President Biden Thursday night combined self-delusion with a complete refusal to address the causes or the real consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden seemed to have set his speechwriters the task of cramming as many maudlin banalities as possible into the first 10 minutes of his speech, as he sought to display the "empathy" that was so lacking in his predecessor, who clearly cared not at all as the COVID death toll in America mounted into the hundreds of thousands.

The language of collective loss, suffering and sacrifice, however, ignored the brutal fact that one section of American society, the super-rich, has lost nothing at all from 12 months of the worst pandemic in a century.

While 527,000 Americans died, the billionaires increased their wealth by $1.4 trillion. While the economy collapsed, millions lost their jobs and hundreds of thousands of small businesses closed their doors forever, the stock market reached new record highs, a process that continues to this day.

Biden, however, in pursuit of his goal of "national unity," said nothing at all about the class divisions that the pandemic has brought to the fore so clearly. He said little about the tidal wave of economic suffering unleashed by the pandemic, and made only one reference to the congressional passage of his American Recovery Act. This legislation aims to buy time for American capitalism by putting off a full-scale collapse of consumer spending until the end of the summer.

The most striking feature of the Biden speech was its narrow nationalism. He spoke as though coronavirus was a meteor that had crashed out of the sky and struck only the United States, not a global pandemic that has affected every country in the world.

He did not acknowledge the 800,000 dead in Europe, or the nearly equal number of dead in Latin America, or the mounting death toll in India and throughout Asia—although not in China, where the pandemic began.

This served two purposes. It allowed Biden to avoid the question of how COVID-19 became such a disaster in the United States, which has performed the worst of all the major capitalist countries, with 30 million infections and more than half a million deaths.

On Wednesday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that COVID-19 increased the death rate by 15 percent, making 2020 the deadliest year in American history, the first year in which three million Americans died. This follows a previous report showing that US life expectancy dropped by a full year in 2020.

Biden began by declaring, "A year ago, we were hit with a virus that was met with silence and spread unchecked. Denials for days, weeks, then months that led to more deaths, more infections, more stress and more loneliness."

But Biden passed over in silence the question of what decisions, driven by what corporate and financial interests, caused this colossal failure, one which directly contradicted the main line of his speech, that there was nothing that Americans could not accomplish if they were united.

Even more importantly, the global character of the pandemic makes nonsense of Biden's claim that there is a national solution to the crisis. In the fairy-tale world of his presentation, all Americans dutifully get vaccinated, the pandemic is subdued, grandparents get to hug their grandchildren and the population joins in happy Fourth of July gatherings—small scale, of course.

But even if such a situation were to come about, the

© World Socialist Web Site

pandemic would still retain colossal global force, constantly throwing up new variants, which would inevitably come to America just as the initial infection did. It is impossible to destroy the pandemic in a single country, because every country is part of a global economy, and whatever variants come to predominate globally will inevitably make their way everywhere—and particularly to a country so interconnected with the world as the United States.

And of course the fairy-tale picture of a united American response to the pandemic is just that: a fiction. Biden was speaking the day after the state of Texas officially ended all restrictions on business operations as well as its mask mandate. Seventeen states, one third of the total, now have no mask mandates and are effectively wide open to the virus.

While Biden touted progress in manufacturing and distributing the vaccine, a quarter of the population, encouraged by Republican demagogues and anti-vaxxers, say they will not get the shots. The president made a veiled reference to this, suggesting that if the population failed to stick together "and conditions change, we might have to reinstate restrictions."

Biden's demands for "national unity" are mainly directed against a far more important target, entirely different from the ultra-right, pro-Trump faction. He referred uneasily to the "loss of faith in whether our government and our democracy can deliver."

The Biden administration faces mounting resistance from the working class and youth, including hundreds of thousands of teachers and students opposed to the administration's campaign to reopen the public schools and universities, which would have the effect of creating new centers of infection in every major city.

Far from Biden's rosy picture of happy Fourth of July gatherings, the likely prospect of his campaign to reopen the schools is a new wave of mass infections and mass death that turns the summer into a more terrible version of the winter months when the death toll rose above 3,000 a day.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site